DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 440 CS 509 976

AUTHOR	Abdullah, Mardziah Hayati
TITLE	Guidelines for Evaluating Web Sites. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CS-98-10
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002011
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698; Web site: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/ieo/digests/d137.html
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; Higher Education; *Resource Materials; *World Wide Web
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *Web Sites

ABSTRACT

Noting that Web sites are becoming popular educational resources but that not every site makes a good resource, this Digest offers a checklist of criteria for evaluating Web sites. It lists evaluation criteria regarding: (1) technical considerations; (2) purpose of the site; (3) content of the site; (4) site authorship/sponsorship; (5) functionality; and (6) design/aesthetics. The Digest also lists several online sources of evaluation criteria for Web sites. Contains 8 references. (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 426 440

Guidelines for Evaluating Web Sites

ERIC Digest
EDO-CS-98-10

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 509 976

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
Indiana University
Smith Research Center
2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150
Bloomington, Indiana 47408-2698

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-98-10

Indiana University
2805 E. 10th St., Suite 150
D137
Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847; (800) 759-4723

Guidelines for Evaluating Web Sites

by Mardziah Hayati Abdullah

With increased access to the Internet, Web sites are becoming popular educational resources. Not every site makes a good resource, however, so how does one decide whether a site is worth using? The following checklist, compiled from several sources, is a summary of criteria for evaluating Web sites; the more criteria a site meets, the more likely it is to be a valuable resource:

Technical considerations

- Verify that the Web site's important capabilities, such as graphics or animations critical to the subject matter, can be utilized with the technology you have available. Some sites require more advanced browsers.
- The page should be stable, that is, consistently available.
- All the links and special features such as audios must be functioning; it is disconcerting if "Error" messages appear.
- If there is a fee for using the site, the site should provide a secure way to send payment.

Purpose

- A site's purpose should be clear, and its content should reflect that purpose, be it to entertain, educate, or sell.
- Advertising should not overshadow the content.

Content

- A site's content should be comprehensible, appropriate, and of value to the intended audience. Awards won by a site may suggest quality but may also be little more than advertising banners for the issuing agencies.
- There should be enough information to make visiting the site worthwhile. Information on how often the site is visited may indicate its usefulness.
- Although there may be variations in how information is ordered, the organization should generally be logical.
- Sites that promote social biases (e.g., gender, racial, or religious biases) should be rejected or critically reviewed.
- If there are large amounts of information on the site, there should at least be a site map or outline of topics that allows users to find topics and move among them easily. A search function for locating information within the site would also be useful.
- The information should be current, accurate, and regularly updated. A "last updated" notification is a useful feature.
- Copyright information is useful if you anticipate copying a substantial amount of the content for dissemination.
- Links to more information on the topic should be provided.
- Graphics should be relevant and appropriate to the content.

Authorship/Sponsorship

- The name of the individual or group creating the site should be clearly stated.
- The Web site author or manager should provide contact information for users to make comments or ask questions.
- Where applicable, reference sources for information cited should be provided.
- Sites that clearly violate copyright statutes or other laws should not be linked, listed, or recommended.

Functionality

- Language used in messages and instructions should be clear, concise and easy to understand.
- The skills required to use the site's features should be appropriate for its intended audience.
- Navigation within the site should be easily carried out. Required "plug-ins" or other helper applications should be clearly identified, and navigational buttons should be of a consistent shape and location. Links should be descriptive of the content, and link text items should sound like invitations to *content*, not "click me/this/here."
- If a search function is available, instructions for conducting searches should be provided.
- There should be consistency in the use of features such as headers, backgrounds, fonts, and colors, particularly when they act as thematic pointers (e.g., sub-headings use a smaller font than major headings).
- A text-only option is useful for sites with a lot of graphics; otherwise, download time may be too lengthy. Generally, wait time should not exceed 15-20 seconds.

Mardziah Hayati Abdullah is an Associate Instructor with the Language Education Department at Indiana University, a Reference Specialist at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, and a faculty member of Universiti Putra Malaysia.

- If necessary, look for features catering to the needs of special populations such as visually impaired and hearing-impaired users. For example, images conveying important messages such as page titles or links should come with alternative text (text that is displayed when the cursor moves over the image), so that visually impaired users using screen readers will hear the relevant text when the cursor is over the image. Audio clips that convey important content (such as lyrics or announcements) must have optional links to readable text for hearing-impaired users.

Design/Aesthetics

- The site design should be appropriately appealing to its intended audience.
- The text should be easy to read, and not cluttered with distracting graphics, fonts, and backgrounds. There should be appropriate "white space," that is, space that is not occupied by text or graphics.
- The design elements and features on the site, such as searchable databases, animations, graphics, sound files, and transitional pages, should be labeled and explained clearly.
- The site should make use of conventional rather than cute but confusing features. For example, hypertext should be in blue text rather than buttons without accompanying text.
- Links should not lead to so many levels that it is difficult for users to get back to the page they started from.
- Sometimes the same site looks different on different browsers. Colors, graphics, and text may change. If you are looking at a Web site on your own computer, check to see how it will appear on the computers that other users, such as students, will be using.
- The color scheme should not be too gaudy and hurtful to the eye. Most experts recommend that a site contain no more than four colors, with a limit of seven throughout the site. Some suggest that a site contain both warm colors (e.g., red, orange, yellow) and cool colors (purple, blue, green). The most important consideration, however, is whether the colors distract from the main message.
- The colors may also need to be appropriate for color-deficient users, who tend to see everything in shades of green and grey, so check to see whether important messages are conveyed by differences or changes in color.
- A site has better readability if dark text appears on a light background, or vice versa. If pages need to be printed, pages using light backgrounds and dark text will produce better hard copies than pages with dark backgrounds and light text.
- Large images should be presented in thumbnail versions, with links to the larger versions

Online sources of evaluation criteria

- Two useful online sources of criteria for evaluating Web sites for children are located at:

  - ❑ Selection Criteria (http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/criteria.html)
  - ❑ Kids Site Selection Guidelines (http://www.scout.cs.wisc.edu/scout/kids/selection.html)

- A comprehensive list of criteria for evaluating Web resources in general is provided by Ann Symons in "Sizing Up Sites: How to Judge What You Find on the Web" in the School Library Journal, v43 n4 p22-25, April 1997, currently available on the online Expanded Academic Full-text Elite database, and as ERIC Database document number EJ543163.

- A Web-based public service offered by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), called *Bobby*, analyzes Web pages for their accessibility to people with disabilities as well as their compatibility with various browsers. This service is currently available at: http://www.cast.org/bobby/

References

Absher, L.(1997). *Beyond Clip Art: Creating Graphics for the Web*. Paper presented at "The Universe at Your Fingertips: Continuing Web Education" Conference (Santa Barbara, CA, April 25, 1997). [ED412903]

Everhart, N. (1997). Web Page Evaluation: Views from the Field. In *Technology Connection, 4*, 24-26. [EJ544697]

Knupfer, N.N. (1997). Visual Aesthetics and Functionality of Web Pages: Where is the Design? In *Proceedings of Selected Research and Development Presentations at the 1997 National Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology* (19th, Albuquerque, NM, February 14-18, 1997). [ED409846]

Luck, D.D., & Hunter, J.M. (1997). Visual Design Principles Applied To World Wide Web Construction. In *VisionQuest: Journeys toward Visual Literacy*. Selected Readings from the Annual Conference of the International Visual Literacy Association (28th, Cheyenne, Wyoming, October, 1996). [ED408985]

Reagan, M.J. (1997). *An Accent on Access: Writing HTML for the Widest Possible Audience*. Paper presented at "The Universe at Your Fingertips: Continuing Web Education" Conference (Santa Barbara, CA, April 25, 1997). [ED412905]

Small, R.V. (1997). *Assessing the Motivational Quality of World Wide Websites*. 16 p. Document available only on microfiche. [ED407930]

Smith, A.G. (1997). Testing the Surf: Criteria for Evaluating Internet Information Resources. In *Public Access Computer Systems Review, 8*, 1-14. [EJ554170]

Sowards, S.W.(1997). Save the Time of the Surfer: Evaluating Web Sites for Users. In *Library Hi-Tech, 15*, 155-58.[EJ557244]

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No RR93002011. Contributors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgement in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official views or opinions of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.